

Why Do the Righteous Suffer

by David Wilkerson

The righteous suffer because it is a part of God's plan for their lives, and it is a way for them to enter into the kingdom of God.

Duration: 59:25

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 53:4-5, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:15, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, James 5:13, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Suffering And Pain", "Godly Empathy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by sharing a personal story about a doctor friend who gained sympathy for those in pain after experiencing kidney stones himself. The speaker then mentions his wife, who receives letters from people all over the United States who are suffering from cancer. Despite her own health struggles, she tries to personally respond to as many letters as possible, showing her deep sympathy for those going through similar experiences. The overall message of the sermon is that God has a way of teaching us empathy and compassion through our own trials and challenges.

Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing to World Challenge P.O. Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771 or calling 214-963-8626.

None of these messages are copyrighted and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to your friends. Heavenly Father, thank you for your precious word. We love it tonight.

We thank you for your presence in this service. You've been here. But now, Lord, we need your anointing.

We need the touch of the Holy Ghost on this word that's being delivered now. Send the Holy Ghost mightily. We take your authority over every demonic spirit, every principality, power of darkness, and we drive them out in the name of Jesus so the word can find place.

Lord, honor your word tonight. Quicken us by the Holy Ghost. Lord, thank you for your anointing.

Thank you for the touch of the Spirit of the living God. Make the word live. Make it life tonight.

We give you glory and honor in Jesus' name. Amen. I've got a very precious doctor friend who was taken into what I call God's school of sympathy.

He couldn't understand all the pain that people complained about because doctors see and hear so much about pain, they get a little immune to it. And he couldn't understand, especially people who had kidney stones, all the screaming for pain. In fact, for a while he told me he thought maybe someone were just wanting a little pain medication until he woke up one day with kidney stones.

And suddenly he realized the pain was real. And he suddenly began to sympathize with all the people over the years that he administered medication to and sent to the hospital. And he never did identify with their pain until he had the kidney stones.

Even my wife had kidney stones. He couldn't understand this agonizing pain though he loved our family very dearly. He couldn't understand.

He said, David, when I got those pains, he said they are real. I had to take medication to stop it. And so he went to the school of sympathy.

Now my dear doctor friend has great sympathy for those in pain. God has a way, doesn't he? I read the letters my wife gets from all over the United States from those who have cancer. And especially women who have had mastectomies or who have found a lump in the breast or they've gone to the doctor and an operation may be necessary.

And she gets literally hundreds of letters from those having cancer. And Gwen guards those letters like they were gold. She answers as many as she can personally.

In fact, the great grief of her heart is that she hasn't had time since she's been sick recently to be able to answer many of these. But you see, Gwen has gone to the school of sympathy. She knows what it's like to walk in the doctor's office and have that test.

And he says, we need to take that out and do a biopsy and then to sit there with the doctor in the office and say, I'm sorry, I need to tell both of you it's cancerous. And after five operations for cancer, that sounds very grieving. And we go out of the office and she says, please give us a half an hour.

He said, we need to put you in right now. We're on our way to a vacation. And they said, no, she needs to do it immediately.

With her background, we go outside the hospital and take a walk, speechless, absolutely speechless. And she said, David, here we go again. I don't understand it.

I'm living in victory. I've loved God now more than I've ever loved him. Why? And you could see the terror in her heart and yet the love for Jesus.

I didn't know how to answer. I was dumbfounded. And it's something to see a woman wake up after that kind of an operation and wake up and look at the bandages and the panic and the terror.

And then next day to say, David, I'm mutilated now. You'll never love me again. And she knows that pain.

She knows that agony. She sympathizes because she's been in the Lord's school of sympathy. And what a blessing she's been to thousands of people, especially women who have that fear.

And since that's been, you know, almost 10 years now, the very fact that she survived, and by the way, she's out of the hospital today and doing well and will be home Wednesday. And I thank God for that.

Once again, she's in the school of sympathy, the school of suffering.

There is a Holy Ghost school of sympathy and it consists of tested saints who have suffered greatly. These are saints of God who've been tested and they've been tossed to and fro. They've been tempted and tried and mistreated.

The Bible, in fact, speaks in Philippians 3.10 of a fellowship of his sufferings. You know what that fellowship of his suffering is? It's a body of believers that have been in great suffering and trial. There's a fellowship among them.

They understand the sufferings of Jesus Christ. They're students of God's school of sympathy. It's a fellowship of shared sufferings, deep, mysterious, unfathomable trials and testings that they alone can understand.

Jesus founded this school, by the way. He set it up, the whole curriculum, he established it because he was the one who suffered the most. And, by the way, we won't graduate until we get our glorified bodies.

You understand there's going to be suffering until Jesus comes. We don't graduate from that school until we get glorified body. But Jesus suffered mentally, physically, with anguish.

He was rejected. He was distrusted. He was abused.

He was mocked. He was laughed at. He knew what it was to be lonely, hungry, poor, unloved, shamed.

He was made to butt of jokes, the Scripture says. He was slandered. He was called a liar, a fraud, a false prophet.

He was humiliated. His own family misunderstood him. His own mother had to ponder things in her heart about him.

His most trusted friends lost faith in him when he spoke of his power of resurrection. His own disciples forsook him and fled when he needed them the most. One of them betrayed him, another denied that he even knew him.

And finally they spat upon him, they mocked him and they murdered him. And the Scripture said, God announced beforehand by the mouth of all his prophets that his Christ should suffer. He's announced it all through this book that when Jesus came, he would be a suffering Savior.

He would be a man of suffering, he'd be a man of pain. And Jesus sympathizes with all of our hurts and sufferings because he went through it all himself. The Scripture says, for we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but who has been tempted in all points as we are yet without sin.

Hebrews 4.15 We have a Savior, the Bible says, that can sympathize with anything we go through because he's been there. Saints, there's nothing that you're experiencing right now in the way of pain and sorrow and suffering that Jesus has not experienced in one form or another. Now, the purpose of my message tonight is to help us understand why the righteous suffer.

Why are some of the godliest people you know going through much, much suffering right now? I believe that Paul had the same concern for the church, the body of Christ. He knew that his own life was a spectacle. He lived in a fishbowl.

The Jews were watching him to see whether or not he would stand the test and the trials. The Jews, you see, had a philosophy that all suffering was a result of God rejecting you. If you were suffering, if you had somebody in your family that died, for example, that was the judgment of God.

And the blessing of God was determined by prosperity. If you were prospering, God loved you. If you were suffering, God was mad at you.

That was the Jewish philosophy. It was not just a tradition, the Jew believed it. Yet few suffered more than Paul.

Remember what Ananias told him right after he was converted? After the light from heaven blinded his eyes? And he's at this house on the street called Straight? Here's what Ananias prophesied. God said, Go to him, for he's a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my namesake.

That's Acts 9, 15, and 16. Paul, you know, if you know anything about his life, lived his entire life through suffering. No man outside of Christ has suffered like Paul the Apostle.

And the word of his suffering spread all through the church like wildfire. The Judaizing Christians and the Judaizing teachers, they just jumped on that. What they were saying, if Paul's gospel is true, see, he doesn't believe in circumcision, and that proves that God's not with him because he's suffering.

You don't believe Paul's doctrine because you look at his life, he's suffering. If God was really with him, if Jesus was really with him, he wouldn't be suffering. He wouldn't be thrown in jail, he wouldn't be shipwrecked.

I've heard evangelists, prosperity evangelists, this past few years saying the same thing. If Paul had faith like we have it today, and the revelation we have, he'd never been in jail, he'd have never suffered. And I call that blasphemy.

I call it outright blasphemy. And you see, this word was spreading all through, and Paul was concerned that this would not give heart failure to the young converts. He knew the Judaizing teachers were going around saying, look at Paul, don't believe his message because he's a man of pain, he's a man of suffering.

God can't be with him. So Paul sent Timothy to the church at Thessalonica with a message. And this is the message that Timothy delivered.

He said, let no man be disturbed by these afflictions. Now Paul had just, he'd been stoned, he had been thrown out of two cities now. They had maligned him, they'd mocked him, they called him all kinds of names.

He was being run out of town. He was being mistreated on all sides, and the word spread everywhere. Look how they're treating Paul.

Paul says, let no man be disturbed by these afflictions. His own afflictions, in other words. For you yourself know that we have been destined to this.

We have been destined to suffer. You can prove that if you don't want to believe what I'm telling you. Mark down 1 Thessalonians 3, 3 and 4. Now this message is going to make some of you angry.

Because you're into a doctrine now that teaches that if you've got a certain quality or quantity of faith, you don't have to suffer. Well I'll tell you what, I've got scripture, I'm on good ground tonight. I'll give you ten scriptures to every one you can bring to me.

I'll give you ten of them. And I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at that damnable doctrine. But I want you to listen to what Paul said.

For yourselves know that we have been destined to this. For indeed, when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction. And so it came to pass as you know.

And then Paul said to the Ephesians, I desire that you faint not at my tribulation. Don't be disturbed, don't be faint hearted, don't get a heart attack. Because you hear, Paul, who preaches a crucified Jesus, is suffering.

Don't be faint hearted. Don't think that God is not with me. Don't think my doctrine is wrong because I'm suffering.

Now this is my purpose tonight, to warn you not to be disturbed by the trouble, the suffering that's in your life. Or the life of some godly person that you know. I want the Holy Spirit to throw some light tonight on what you're going through.

Especially the deep hurt that you have now that you love Jesus more than you've ever loved Him. Now that you've repented. You can be very, very sure tonight that God has a purpose behind everything you and I suffer.

God has a purpose. First of all, let me get right into it. First of all, we should not be surprised when we suffer.

The Bible has warned us in advance that the godly in Christ will suffer. The Bible is full of it. The New Testament is full of it.

Now I don't care what teacher. I don't care what pastor. I don't care what evangelist told you that trusting saints don't have to suffer if you have the proper faith.

Let me tell you what the apostles taught. Just the exact opposite of that. Let me tell you what the apostles taught.

In fact, let's talk about what Jesus said first of all. You don't have to turn there, but John 16, 33. Jesus said, In the world ye shall have tribulation.

And that word tribulation that Jesus used in Greek is flippus. Flippus, which means anguish, burdens, persecutions, and trouble. The Lord said in this world you're going to have anguish, burdens, persecution.

You're going to have trouble. Jesus also forewarned that in the last days there would be great troubles fall upon all God's people. Then they will deliver you to tribulation.

And that's the same word. They'll deliver you to burdens and persecution and troubles. And they will kill you.

And you will be hated of all nations on account of my name. Now folks, I listened to all this sweet pablum preaching about America returning back to God. And I hear people say, God is going to bless and save America because we've been evangelizing the world, which is wrong because we're spending more on dog food than we are on evangelism right now in America.

That's a gospel truth. We're spending more on dog food than on sending missionaries to the mission field. We are not evangelizing the world.

We're not evangelizing the world. Korea is sending out missionaries. Now, Mexico is sending out missionaries.

We do have young people that still have the burden. God will always have the people. But this nation, this government is trying to shut down missionary work on all sides, cooperating with governments around the world for that purpose.

They say, well, we're good to Israel, we're good to the Jews, so God's going to save America. Paul says, or Jesus said, you will be hated of how many nations? All nations. Do you think that includes the United States? You say it can't happen here? Persecution against Christians can't happen here? Oh, you know, they told us that there would never be a time in America that gay rights would be constitutionally protected.

But now 500,000 gays marched in New York City. 500,000 gays. The gay life is protected by the Constitution of the United States.

They said it could never happen here. It's happened, hasn't it? Who would ever believe that there would be a national plague protected by constitutional rights? Age is right now protected. There's a law in Congress soon to be passed that if you tell anybody of someone having age, you could be taken to jail.

You could be jailed for exposing anybody with age, including doctors. You say it can't happen in America? It's about to happen. Listen, I don't know if you saw it, but in USA Today, this is this weekend's paper, America, you don't have to die.

Now, it costs \$75,000 for a full-page ad in this paper. And this is USA Today. And it's written by, I don't know who the man is, Alton Newell.

Can I read something? This is not a preacher. You know, while the preachers are saying peace and safety, we've got businessmen paying \$75,000 to try to wake up America. Where preachers ought to be doing it.

And those of us who are preaching, they call us gloom, doom preachers. Make fun. I've been mocked more by the Assemblies of God probably than any other denomination in the face of the earth.

Listen to what he says. As I move up and down the East Coast, Midwest, and the western part of the United States, I have seen large plants with decaying buildings sitting silent, surrounded by empty parking lots. Not long ago, these plants helped make a giant industrial might that kept us strong.

Many of our national, international companies are simply moving their operation to foreign soil to get cheaper, more dedicated labor. In recent years, more and more goods are coming from overseas. Japan has now taken over first place in the production of automobiles and steel for the whole world.

This is the main reason that we have fallen from the largest supplier of capital to the world. Now we've become the largest debtor nation in history. I'm afraid we've become fat and lazy.

Let's go on down. He said, take a look at what I refer to now as our moral decay in America. You don't have to take my word for it.

You can look up the statistics for yourself to find that America has more violent crime, four to five times as much as almost any country in Europe. Our forefathers left Europe to find a better place to live. They found that place and it lasted for many generations.

But something has gone wrong. We have the largest market for drugs in the world. We have the largest number of cases of AIDS.

We're the most intolerant people in the world now. You drive too close to me on the freeway and I'll shoot you. You honk at me when I'm stopped at a traffic light and I'll fight you.

If you don't treat me right in a business deal, I'll sue you. If I don't get out of life what I think I'm entitled to, I'll kill to get it. We're filling our jails faster than we can build them.

And we're still losing the battle. A lot of the little and unimportant people going to jail is just the tip of the iceberg. Never was there a time when the politicians and high executives of the business world have shown more greed than today.

The investigation going on in Washington, D.C. now stands to result in the rest of hundreds of our top politicians, our corporate executives. I hope that they can soon clean out the rat's nest that's been building for years. I hear all across America this statement lately, America's doomed.

That's not a preacher, folks. That's a businessman paying to preach his message. You say it can't happen in America.

We can't be persecuted. I say it's coming. But Paul went, that's corporate suffering.

That's the whole body of Christ suffering. But I want to zero in on personal suffering. Paul went about warning believers that they would experience deep personal sufferings.

Now you who sit here tonight and you're experiencing deep personal suffering, hear what Paul said. I'm reading from Acts 14. Don't turn to Acts 14.22. Paul went about confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith and that we must, now listen to this, we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Very seldom do I ever have a people repeat anything after me. I'm not crazy about it. But I want you to repeat.

I'm going to say it one more time. I want you to repeat it so it's marked down. Through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Say it. Through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Through much tribulation.

Again, that Greek word is the same word that Jesus used, meaning anguish, burdens, persecution, troubles. Paul is saying, Yea, in all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. All that live

godly.

That's 2 Timothy 3.12. You see, the godly in order enter into the kingdom. Are they going to enter without suffering, without sickness, without pain? No, the Bible said through much anguish, much persecution, many burdens, many troubles. Through much tribulation.

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God because of your perseverance and your faith in the midst of all of your persecution and all of the afflictions which you are enduring. He said, I go about boasting on you people because in spite of your suffering, in spite of all your afflictions, you're holding strong to God. You're not doubting, you're not questioning God.

He said, that makes me proud of you. Jesus warns of a certain kind of believer who's going to stumble and fall when trouble, persecution and affliction arises in their life. I'm going to read a scripture, you don't have to turn there.

By the way, you will be following me in the scripture. I'm not going to leave you out of this. I'll get to that in just a bit.

But I'll read to you Matthew 13. Don't turn to Matthew 13, 20 and 21. Jesus is speaking.

He that received the seed into stony places, the same as he that heareth the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself and he endures for a little while, but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, very soon he's offended. And that word offended means he falls away. He becomes an apostate.

Now, you know who this is? And he's here tonight and she's here tonight. In the balcony down here, I don't know where you're sitting. There may be a dozen, maybe two dozen.

I have an idea there's many. And Jesus is the one who exposed it. And Jesus is talking about this individual who's been sitting in some dead church, compromising, and then suddenly they hear the word of God.

Somehow it awakens them. They become alive to the word of God. They get on fire and with joy they receive this new revelation of what God is saying.

And I tell you they become a walking commercial for the church. They go about saying, you've got to come to my church. Boy, do our pastors preach the word.

I'll tell you there's a message. It's changed my life. I used to be a compromiser and all the Lord's come down and he's changed me.

I've never been like this. I used to be full of sin and compromise. I'm walking in holiness.

I'm walking in righteousness. And oh, they're so excited. By the way, we've been here nine months and some of those very excited people, the first five months that we were here, most excited people used to hug the pastors.

You couldn't get out because they'd meet you in the aisle and hug you. Say, I've never been so challenged by the word of God. I've never been so excited about the Bible.

I don't see them anymore. I don't see them. That doesn't mean that you're not excited.

The excited ones are still here. Those that are going on are still here. But you see, with joy they first receive it.

But you see, that's just a veneer because underneath that stony heart has not been broken. And then affliction comes. Trials come.

Persecution comes. Suffering comes. And they don't understand and they're offended by it.

Or they see other godly people suffering and they don't understand it. I've had people in this church, God bless their hearts. And I'm not condemning about it.

But you see, when Gwen passed out three Sunday nights ago, tonight, in the back of the church, she just passed out. And I saw people back there wringing their hands and I know it was out of love. And I had at least five or six people come back to me after the ambulance took her out to the hospital.

And they said, Dave, I don't understand. I don't understand. She's so sweet.

She's so loving. She's not living in sin. Why ain't God allowed that? Why is she suffering? She's suffered all her life.

Why now? You come here to New York to live to pastor a church now? Why would she have to suffer like that? And I could see the offense. They were offended by it. They were questioning God.

I wasn't, but they were. God had already told me she's going to be alright. God already made it clear.

I understood something that the Holy Spirit's been teaching us about suffering. And by the way, though I didn't have the pain, I hurt just as bad for her. Your husband, your wife, your children hurt.

You hurt just as bad, don't you? Faith Brown, my secretary's sister, is in a hospital right now in the last stages of bone cancer. She's dying. Faith started with me here in this city years ago.

And she's given the last 25 years of her life working with ghetto children. She's just spent her life, literally spent her life. She's godly.

She's a wonderful, dedicated, holy young lady. She's living above sin, above reproach. I don't know of anyone who's given her life more than Faith Brown.

But she's dying. The cancer's eaten right through her bones. She doesn't even have a hip left.

She's absolutely, they just give her a few short times, a little time to live. And I was there in her room the other night praying with her. And I actually pictured, I didn't see it visibly, but in my spiritual mind, I saw Jesus just take her by the right hand and start leading her into green pastures.

And the Holy Spirit was so precious in the room. There was no fear. There was no anxiety.

But you see, some of her friends are offended by what's happening to Faith Brown. Not her family, but some friends. But I've got a word.

You know what the Bible says? Psalms 116.15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. You know what that word precious means? I looked it up. Valuable and necessary to Him.

How valuable and necessary it is for me to take them. I need them was what the Lord's saying. Now, it hurts you, but you see, people said, well, Faith Brown's ministry isn't finished yet.

They don't realize that in heaven, in eternity, we still have a ministry. Oh, we have a ministry. We're going to oversee the majesties of Christ Jesus.

I mean, there are universes and universes. There's a ministry of His glory beyond anything you've known. If you thought you had a ministry, where do you get the glory? The Lord's just saying, this world's had Faith long enough.

I loathed her long enough. I need her now. I'm going to bring her to my side.

It's valuable to me. It's necessary to me. You may miss it.

I'll fill up that empty spot in the family. I'll do it, but I need Faith Brown. Paul said boldly, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

Glory to God. He goes on, in nothing terrified by your adversaries. Your adversaries are demon power, sickness, disease.

In nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a token of perdition, but to you a salvation. What he's saying, the worldly people look at you, and you talked about Faith all your life, and you talked about healing, and now you're suffering, and they take that as a sign of perdition, that God's angry at you, God's killing you. But he said, in your heart you know it's salvation.

He said, don't worry about what the world says. Don't worry about what they think about your suffering. Folks, it doesn't matter what the world thinks about you being unemployed, or anything else, suffering of any kind.

It doesn't matter what they say. Forget it. Hallelujah.

The Apostle did not preach the kind of painless gospel being preached today. Christians are being told that it's not God's will for believers to suffer at all. But let me tell you what the Apostles preached.

Peter said, wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God. Oh, you've got to look at that, 1 Peter. You don't believe that's in the Bible? Look at it, 1 Peter.

Mark it down. 1 Peter, the 4th chapter. 1 Peter, the 4th chapter, and the 19th verse.

Mark it down. Go home and study it. And boy, I'll tell you, anybody asks you about your suffering, you say, it's not the will of God.

Just quote this scripture. Do it with a smile. Peter said, that's in 1 Peter, 4th chapter, 19th verse.

Wherefore, let them that suffer according to what? Suffer according to the will of God? How many have that in your Bible? Raise your hand. How many have a different Bible that's not theirs? Raise your hand. Because we're about to call the ambulance.

I'm not being funny. That is in your Bible, my brother, sister. It's there.

Let them commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator. Look at 1 Peter 2, 21. 1 Peter 2, 21.

This is the end of side one. You may now turn the tape over to side two. 21.

Because Christ also, what? Suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps. Huh? Huh. I don't know.

I'm picking up some bad habits. You know what Peter is saying? It's enough to know God is faithful. He won't let you suffer more than you're able.

He will, whether suffering make a way of escape, you may be able to bear it. So, commit the keeping of your body and your soul to Him who's faithful. Hallelujah.

Look at 1 Peter 4, 12. No, go to 1 Peter 5, 10. 1 Peter 5, 10.

Do you have it? But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after what? After you have suffered a while, make you complete, establish, strengthen, settle you. Look back at 1 Peter 4, 12 and 13. 1 Peter 4, 12 and 13.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fire trial which is to try you as though some strange thing has happened unto you. But what? Rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. Hallelujah.

You know what Paul said? Don't turn to Philippians 3.8. He said, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I do count them, but dung that I may win Christ. He said, You can have it all, brother, sister. I want Jesus.

Now, look at me. Do Christians suffer? Do godly, holy people walking in pure faith suffer? Would you call Paul a godly man of faith? Let me tell you what Paul admitted to. This is just some of the suffering he confessed he had in his life.

This is Paul's negative confession. And I'm not being facetious. I mean, somebody would mock Paul on this thing.

It's all negative. It's not negative. I consider it a positive confession that Jesus kept him through it all.

You know what Paul said? Because I picked it all through the Scripture. He said, I've been beaten above measure. I've been frequently imprisoned.

I've been in deaths often. Five times I was beaten by the Jews 40 stripes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods.

I mean, those were like baseball bats. I was stoned and left for dead. Three times I was shipwrecked.

I was a whole day and a night in the deep, dark waters. I've known perils in water, perils on land, peril of robbers and peril of countrymen and peril of the wilderness. He said, I've been weary.

I've had pain. I've had sleepless nights. I was hungry.

I was thirsty. I was cold. I was naked.

I had all the cares of the churches pressing on me. I had anxiety within and fightings without. I had turmoil on all sides.

I was cast down, persecuted, troubled, distressed on all sides. But never did I give up. And they tell me Christians don't suffer.

Through all the pain and suffering, Paul could say triumphantly, for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8, 18. He said, all the suffering that you see in me, don't be moved by it.

Don't give heart failure. He said, I'm comparing all this with what's waiting for me. And he said, if you knew what's waiting for me, you wouldn't be concerned at all.

I'm not concerned. Don't worry about Paul. Don't worry about me, folks.

I'm going to glory. And secondly, the purpose of suffering is to produce comforters to the body of Christ. To produce comforters to the body of Christ.

There's a school of sympathizers who've been tested in the fire that come out proving God is faithful. Now, I want you to get your Bibles out now and get to 1 Corinthians. I'm starting to preach now.

2 Corinthians. I'm just beginning to preach. 2 Corinthians.

This is my message now. 2 Corinthians, the first chapter. I want to show you clearly, unmistakably, why you're going through what you're going through if you love Jesus.

Now, I ask for my own thinking right now. Up in the balcony in here in main floor, how many of you have to admit before a holy God that in the past month, especially in the past three months or so, you've really been going through, you've been suffering. Raise your hand, please.

Or it's in your home or your life. Somebody near you is suffering. Raise your hand, please.

Up in the balcony. Yes. All over this theater tonight.

People suffering. By the way, if you didn't raise your hand, just wait. But I'll tell you what.

I think maybe God's preparing you. He'll give you a good word. When the enemy comes up like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raises up standard.

That's His word. Hallelujah. Would you read 2 Corinthians, His first chapter, verse 3, beginning.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. Isn't that wonderful? The God of all comfort. He first tells us He's the God of comfort.

And then look what we go into. Who comforted us in all our tribulation, saying Greek word, which means trouble and anguish, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

And whether we be afflicted, it's for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. Whether we be comforted, it's for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of all our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. Now that doesn't mean Paul was contemplating suicide. What Paul was saying, I came to a place, I didn't know whether I was even going to make it.

I didn't even believe I could survive it. It was more than I could handle. Verse 9, But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead.

All right, now let's look at it. Look this way, please. You know, God sees what's coming ahead for the church.

I don't think any of us here tonight realize what we're headed for. If you and I really knew what we're headed for, if we didn't have the Lord preparing us, I don't think we'd be ready at all. I think God's preparing it.

And I'll tell you what, God's not going to be caught short. God's never been caught short. He knows what the future is.

There is coming to the church tribulations, afflictions, such as the world has never experienced, such as the church has never experienced in all of its history. All the sufferings of the New Testament church are not to be compared with what lies ahead. And God is not going to be caught without a tried and true body of witnesses who have been in the fire, who've been tested, and have gone to the school of Christ's sympathy, and are going to come forth as examples, strong and true, without questioning.

And there's a reason for it. Some of you may not even know or understand why God is taking you through such deep, deep testings. Some of you sitting here or hearing me tonight, you have been through difficulties that nobody could understand when you went through it.

Just like Paul, you said, I despaired of life. It was beyond measure. It was more than I could handle.

And you didn't understand it. You were nearly ready to cave in and give up. But somehow the Holy Ghost came to you and strengthened you.

You look back now and you see how He brought you through. You don't know how He did it. You couldn't sit down and explain it to me.

You couldn't explain it to anybody. You say, I don't know how He did it, but He did it. I'm still standing.

And I'm saying to you, God's faithful. I've been tested. I've been tried.

But He was faithful to me. See, the Lord was taking you into His school of sympathy. God has a ministry of comfort that He wants to bring forth in these last days.

You say, well, the Holy Ghost is a comforter, but the Holy Ghost uses human beings. He uses us. He works through human flesh.

The Holy Ghost comforts through people. We are vessels. We are channels of the Holy Spirit.

And all that you went through was not just for your training. It's not just to train you. It was to bring you through training, yes, but not for your own good only, but for the good of others, for the body of Jesus Christ.

Why? The Scripture says that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort by which we ourselves have been, we have received comfort of God. In other words, the Lord is saying, I took you through this trial so that you could come forth as a testimony of my faithfulness. You could stand before anyone else who's going through the same thing that you went through, and you could say, hold on, brother, hold on, sister.

I've been there, and God's faithful. Just look at me. Don't be afraid.

I came through it. God will bring you through it. God's saying, the same comfort I gave you, I want you to give to others.

I'm going to be a channel right through you. And that's why God lets you go through what you went through. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolation also abounded by Christ.

You become a counselor. You become a comforter. Hallelujah.

You don't have to stand up here and preach behind the pulpit. I get so many that I hear saying they want to be a preacher. I want to go full-time into the ministry.

This is a full-time ministry of comforting. Wherever you turn, on the job, wherever you be, you should be a comforter. Paul makes it very clear that some Christians are permitted to endure more affliction, not just for their own learning, but because God has a plan or a ministry for them.

The Scripture says whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and for your salvation. Paul said, look, I'm suffering. Yes, I'm learning lessons, but what I'm learning is not just for me, it's for you.

I'm an example, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which you also suffer. He said, knowing that as you are shares of our suffering, so you're also going to share of our comfort. You're going through the same thing I went through.

If you hold on, you'll get the same comfort I got from the Holy Ghost. Now, who is there in the church today with enough God and enough trust in Jesus to say, this thing that I'm going through is going to comfort others, it's going to bless others, it's going to save others, because they're going to go through it, and they're going to see in me strength and established faith, tribulation, work with patience, and they're going to see somebody who's not ruffled every time something happens. All what we need in New York City are strong Christians.

We need some of you. We've got a number of you that have been tested with AIDS. We need some of you that have been through that kind of fire, going to stand up.

I don't care. I believe God can heal you, but I don't care if there's a sickness comes through. You stand there in the name of Jesus Christ and say, the God of all comfort is with me, and you can stand going to any hospital where people are dying with AIDS and say, if you'll repent and give your heart to Jesus Christ, the same God that's holding me up will hold you up.

Today, the church of Jesus Christ must have a people who've not been offended or destroyed by their sufferings. They're not cast down. They're not dejected.

They're not full of questions, but they're an example to the weak, a source of true comfort and consolation. Oh, it's so easy for people who've never suffered to toss around their cheap advice. Oh, I know a lot of people like that.

They'll come around. They've never been tested, never been tried, but they'll tell you how to endure. What they're really saying, if you have the kind of faith I have, you don't have to, so look at me.

That's no testimony. I don't want somebody to come to me, never been tested, and tell me what to do about trusting God. I want somebody burnt through the fire.

Glory to God. Go to Hebrews 12. Are you beginning to catch on? Do you know that you're in school? The school of sympathy.

The Lord's teaching you to sympathize with others in their pain. He's not just training you. Yes, you're training, but he's also training you to comfort others in your sickness and trial.

Hebrews 12, beginning of verse 6. Hebrews 12, beginning of verse 6. For whom the Lord loveth, he... You know what that means? And scourgeth? That means he spansk him. That's a loving father applying the rod. Every son whom he receiveth.

If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons. For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, wherefore ye are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence.

Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father's Spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our what? For our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Oh, hey, listen.

Anybody tells you that going through suffering, that you're just going to be stoic and stand there and don't shed a tear, you're going to be macho man. I don't even find that in my Bible. No, the Bible said it's not joyous, it's grievous.

Go ahead and cry. The Lord understands that. Don't try to stand up and grit your teeth and say, Bless God, I'm going to bite the bullet.

No, you lean on the bosom of Jesus and you cry it out. Don't try to act tough. No chastening.

None of it seems joyous in the present, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth a peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are trained or exercised thereby. Therefore, wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down on the feeble knees.

Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, and let it rather be healed. All right, I'm going to stop right there, and I want to tell you what I believe that means. Are you still listening? Some that are hearing me right now are enduring such great sufferings because you're being chastened by the Lord.

The Lord sees that there's a heart that needs to be broken. He sees a will that needs to be broken. And I want to tell you, if He's chastening you right now, He's doing it in love, because whom the Father loves, He chastens.

If you're under the chastening rod of the Lord, it's nothing to fear unless you have a stubborn nature. But if you're being chastened by the Lord, the Scripture said it's for your profit, and it will afterward produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness if you're trained by it. But if you allow the root of bitterness to spring up, it's going to destroy you and defy you, the Scripture says.

And the only way to keep bitterness out and keep from being defiled by your suffering, the Scripture says, is to lift up your hands that hang down, and your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, rather let it be healed. And you know what the Scripture is saying by that? It means, rouse yourself up, awaken yourself, shake off your apathy, and get back to seeking and trusting God. Because the tendency is, when you suffer, is to slack off and just say, Look, I'm too hurt to pray.

I don't understand it, so I can't read my Bible. And that's the trick of the devil. That's the trick of the devil.

And the Bible says, strengthen your feeble knees. Where does that strength come from? From the Word of God. What He's saying, make straight paths.

Don't waver from your walk of obedience. Get back to being obedient. Get back to walking with me straight.

Strengthen the feeble knees. And if you don't, He says, there's going to be an apostasy stand in. And then you'll be crippled.

The lame is going to be out of joint, and it can't be healed again. He said, let it be healed right now. Deal with this.

Don't let it happen to you. I believe the choice is our own. All right, now I'm going to try to wrap it up and get right down to what we call the bottom line here.

Get rid of every thought of quitting. I just hit a nerve. Quitting.

Bring into every captivity every thought of easing off on your total obedience to the Lord. Now, listen to me. If you don't get this, you won't understand anything I've said tonight.

It's not affliction or suffering of itself that teaches us. Because I know many people, many good Christians, who have been destroyed by their sufferings. They have been blown away by it.

Do you know anybody like that? They gave up. They said, I don't understand it. They see godly people suffer, and they've just given up.

They quit on the Lord. They say it doesn't work, and they quit. Nope.

The only way you're trained by suffering, the only way it can work out the fruit of righteousness in you and in me, it is not suffering, but it's suffering understood. It is affliction that is accepted and not rejected because the hand of God has permitted it, and He's done it for a purpose. Now, I want you to listen very closely.

The natural mind, the natural man is irritated and depressed by any kind of suffering. He's depressed by it. He's irritated by it.

And unless you understand that God permits it, you'll never be trained by it. You'll never learn from it. You will go out saying, God is not fair.

Why is God allowing this? I pray, I fast, I seek God. But look what's happening to me. David said, in the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord.

In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord. This is why God allows it in some of our lives. He looks at some of it and says, Now, you have a tendency, every time I prosper and bless you, to forget me.

You have a tendency to forget me, days on end. David was that way. He said, if I hadn't sought the Lord, I'm going to read you.

Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now, I have sought thy word. In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord.

The whole purpose of it is to drive you away from self-dependency and drive you to total dependency on the Lord Jesus Christ. By the way, let me give you a good argument for the devil. Next time the devil or any imps of hell come at you and try to accuse you of God being mad at you, you're suffering.

Now, there are people who suffer from sin. That's a whole other message. Some of you under the chastisement of the Lord, yes, but he does that in love to his children.

But next time, here's what you bring to the devil. First of all, Jesus Christ suffered mightily in the flesh, and he was perfect. Didn't he suffer? Tell that to the devil.

Paul and all our church fathers suffered great afflictions, and God loved them dearly, didn't he? And they all suffered, the Scripture says. Instead of sufferings and afflictions being a sign of God's displeasure, it's a sign of sonship. The Bible said, Where is there a son of mine that I don't chastise? If I'm not chastising him, he's not a son.

Instead of letting the devil tell you it's a sign of God's displeasure, it's a sign of sonship. Every affliction is intended for my spiritual benefit, my growth, to equip me to sympathize with others who are in need. It's grievous, it's painful, yes, and I cry out of my hurt, but afterward, if I receive it, if I'm trained by it, it's going to bear fruit.

I'm going to become more like Jesus. Tell that to the devil. All right, in closing, God has promised a day of deliverance out of all our afflictions, but, oh, it's not the way we've been thinking about it.

Let me give you the Scripture that we base this on. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord, what? Delivereth him out of them all. Now, the Hebrew word used here for affliction is ra, and it means evil, calamity, distress, mischief, sorrow, trouble, misery, wretchedness.

That pretty well covers it all, doesn't it? The Lord says many, many are the afflictions, the troubles, the miseries, the wretchedness, the mischief, the sorrow, the distress, the calamity of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all. There are many. The Bible said the righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their troubles.

That's Psalms 34, 17. The word deliver here means to snatch away, to pull out, to rescue. But how does God deliver His children? Now, folks, please, this is my closing thought tonight, and I want you to catch this.

God so drove this into my heart today, this afternoon in prayer, and I want it to be driven by the Holy Ghost into your heart. How does God deliver His children out of all their afflictions? Does He just come down and suddenly stop all of the turmoil? Does He suddenly just stop everything and say, that's it, no more suffering, no more pain, no more sorrow? Now, we know God can just speak the word and deliver us, can't He? You know that the angel of the Lord already encamps around those that fear Him and delivers them. You know that the angel of the Lord is there to keep you from dashing your foot against a stone.

You know He can call a legion of angels. He can call the heavenly host. He can call the chariots of God.

God can speak the word and just stop everything in your life that causes your suffering. But it doesn't work that way. That's not what the Bible means at all.

And this is where we have mistaken this whole idea of deliverance. We have people that think that they're a great testimony because they can stand up and they say, oh, one day I got the vision of faith. God just stopped, no more suffering in my life, all the pain's gone, everything's gone.

Listen, the Lord Jesus is not going to take you halfway and drop you. My Bible says that He will not spare for our crying. He will not spare for our crying.

In fact, if you're a parent and you're disciplining your child right in the middle of your child cries out, enough, enough, then you stop because you're moved out of pity just out of that cry. The Lord said He'll not spare for our crying. He's going to wait until the work is done.

He's not going to take you in the furnace and then He hears you cry and say, well, I can't stand your crying anymore, my dear. Come on out of the furnace when the work's only half done. He won't do it because that's giving up on you.

That's God saying it didn't work. That's God saying I gave you half the lesson. But I'm just so sorry for you, and I just can't stand your crying anymore.

I'm just so touched with the feelings of your infirmity that I just can't do it. That's not what the Bible means at all. No, the secret is Paul, Paul.

I'm going to read it to you. Don't turn it, but 2 Corinthians 4, 11. He said we're delivered through death.

All deliverance comes through death, dying to self. You cannot be delivered from all your afflictions until you die to your ambition, to your will, and everything else. You can't die, and the Lord won't take you out until you die.

I'm going to read it to you. For we which live are always delivered, what? Unto death. Delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our mortal flesh.

Oh, here's the mistake we made. We want to hasten our escape, and the Lord says, no, you're going to Calvary. You're going to Calvary, and I'm not going to give up on you.

I love you too much. The pain, you may say it's not enough, but I know how much you can take. And I'm not going to let it stop until it's done its work.

And that work is total crucifixion, total death to the self-life, to my ambition, to my will, until you say, oh God, I want you to make me so dead that I don't care anymore. I don't care anymore. There is no deliverance through resignation.

It's through resurrection. God will not resign on us. David said, our fathers trusted in thee.

They trusted, and thou didst deliver them. You know what he's talking about? They were at the Red Sea. The fathers were at the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's armies coming down on them.

He said, they cried, and you delivered them. How did he deliver them? By taking them down into death. The Red Sea is a type of death.

They went down and died in the bottom of the Red Sea. And God delivered them through death. Jesus went the same way.

He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up to death for us all. How shall he not with him also free to give us all things? Do you know what real deliverance is? Do you know what being set free from affliction is? It's saying, Lord Jesus, I stay with you. I know that you're faithful.

I know that you'll not allow one thing more than I'm able to bear. Take me all the way to my crucifixion. Take me to the place, O Lord, where my will is destroyed.

Where I have nothing left but my dependence and my faith on you, Jesus. I'm not looking to man. I'm not looking to somebody else.

I'm looking to you, Jesus. Let me die. Let me die to self.

Lord, and then when I'm dead to self, nothing can hurt me. Nothing can hurt me. Then come what may, no matter what the suffering is down the road, I'm dead.

I'm dead to it. I'm dead, and I've already proven God faithful. Hallelujah.

Because the whole purpose of suffering is that we may bring forth life to ourselves and to others. That we may produce life. That every time you testify to somebody, life comes out of you.

Because life comes only out of death. Glory be to God. Hallelujah.

I want to die to self. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Are you suffering? Are you hurting? You know what something else you're doing with your hurting and your suffering? Aren't you beginning to feel a little more sympathy for others who are hurting? Huh? You're not as judgmental as you once used to be. Correct? Do you know all your failure, all the things that you've done that have grieved the Lord? Haven't you mourned over it so much? So that you begin to pray for others that are going through that struggle? When somebody comes up and they say, Oh, I've been going through a great problem with lust and everything else. You don't sit there saying, poor brother.

Aren't you sitting there saying, Oh Lord Jesus, I know what you brought me through. Bring them through it. That's what the body is all about.

Hallelujah. Lord, bring death to us tonight through the cross of Jesus. Lord Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, make it real.

That God is allowing these things in our life to destroy our ambition, to destroy our self-will, and to bring us to the will of God. So that there's nothing left but a desire to serve Him in fullness. Hallelujah.

This is the conclusion of the tape.

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